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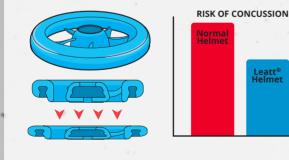






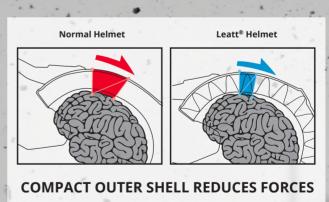


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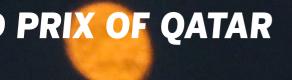












LORD OF THEFILERS

THE THIRTEENTH EDITION OF THE COMMERCIAL BANK GRAND PRIX OF QATAR WAS ALSO THE NINTH UNDER BULBS AND THE TENTH YEAR IN A ROW THAT LOSAIL THUNDERED THE SERIES INTO LIFE. THE EVENING BELONGED TO JORGE LORENZO AND HERE ARE SOME OF THE THEMES THAT FLOATED AROUND THE NIGHT AIR JUST OUTSIDE OF DOHA THANKS TO A FULL COMPLIMENT OF BLOGS AND PERSPECTIVE...

Photos by CormacGP www.cormacgp.com
By Adam Wheeler, Blogs by David Emmett, Matthew Roberts, Gavin Emmett

otoGP bubbled up through tests, extra sessions and a pervading sense of the unknown for the first Grand Prix of 2016 and five months after the captivating and controversial closing chapter of 2015 in Valencia. Although an air of mystery initially hung over the performance potential of electronics and controlled tyres in yet another significant technical shift for the sport, the results sheets soon cleaned away some of the speculation. Have a flick through our Blogs from the heart of MotoGP and some superb imagery thanks to Cormac Meenan's lens in the following pages...

"There are a lot of Ducatis up front, more than we have ever seen, so this means that the bike works. For sure the Honda will arrive. We will see who can fight for the win," prophetic words from the World Champion who understated his own chances through press conferences and debriefs throughout the weekend in Qatar. We all know that Jorge Lorenzo notched his sixth consecutive MotoGP podium and third win from that bunch at Losail. It was also his sixth at the circuit, making him the most successive racer 'in the desert' and overthrowing the total of former world champion - Casey Stoner - who was present in the Ducati pitbox and is integral to plotting the overthrow of Yamaha. The vast Italian set-up appeared refreshed with their Desmosedici...but then red bikes also occupied two podium places in Qatar in 2015. Michelin helped the race finish seven seconds faster compared to the final throe by Bridgestone last March and the Magneti Marelli-control electronics were conquered by the likes of Marc Marquez who found almost a second-a-lap compared to his testing time but were also a factor in the set-up mix-up that caused Cal Crutchlow to go left when he wanted to go right.

Lorenzo thrived in the wake of a positive off-season and the Ducatis had a horsepower advantage (Dani Pedrosa said he was sacrificing three tenths of a second every time he hit the straight...amid other comments on the excessive winglets from the Desmo that were causing turbulence). Rossi, who astonishingly has only missed four Grands Prix in two decades of racing at the highest level, will anticipate another two visits to Losail at least in 2017 and 2018, and will want more potency compared to last Sunday's race in which he was a factor for the podium but lacked the edge to replicate his victory from 2015.





Behind Pedrosa in fifth (the Catalan wearing a bemused, almost indifferent expression throughout the Grand Prix) was Maverick Viñales who with sixth equalled his personal best in the class but did not live up to pre-race hype and complained about the GSX-RR sliding around in the race that affected his speed and possibilities to relegate Pedrosa, (almost ten years his senior). "The Suzuki is also quick for at least a lap and we'll see if Maverick is ready to push the bike to the maximum," forecast Lorenzo. "He'll have to hold this pressure of pushing all the way for the win." Viñales' progress and development will be one of the key points to watch as MotoGP works across the continents in the coming weeks.

"A think a rider who is sensitive on the bike will have the advantage this year with the changes both in terms of the race and a single lap," '99' also said and it was clear that his decision to try the soft Michelin rear for the race and push away from Dovizioso revealed the defending champion to be an apt definition for his claim in both aspects.



Moto2 was blighted by grid and start light chaos and marked by Jonas Folger tossing away one of the most straightforward victories of his young career. Instead it fell to Thomas Luthi to secure a fifth win from seven years in the class. World Champion Johan Zarco was four positions worse off than his eighth spot in 2015; although the early setback did then prompt a twelve-race run of podiums for the Frenchman. Moto3 was predictably thrilling and Niccolo Antonelli needed a photo-finish verification to confirm his seven thousandth of a second victory over Brad Binder.

When pressed to express his thoughts on 2016 ahead of the red light disappearing at Losail Lorenzo was articulate on the state of the times, even if the 42nd win of his MotoGP career (bringing him to within 12 of Mick Doohan's haul of 54 and third place in the all-time list) means that that people will again he shooting for him in the months and meetings to come. "It is difficult to compare times, years and moments but, for me, in terms of concentration and focus, riding and physical condition is it one of the best moments in the history of the championship, I believe."

Read on for some talking points...



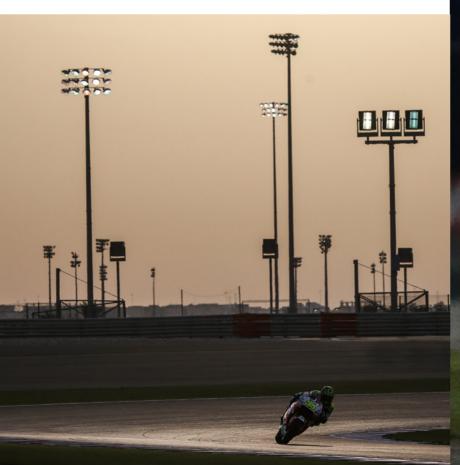


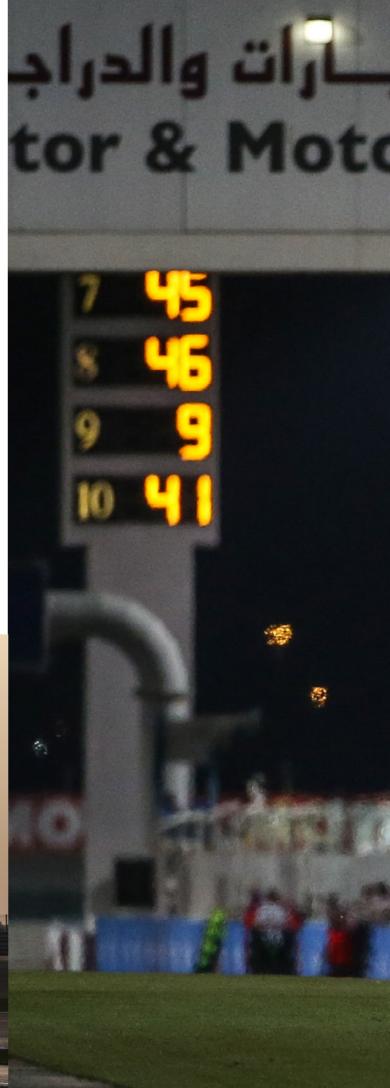
LOSAIL...

A traditional press conference between Dorna CEO Carmelo Ezpeleta and representatives from the QMMF, Losail and sponsor Commercial Bank took place on the second day of the Grand Prix and where Ezpeleta was moved to admit: "Qatar is an incredible asset of the championship."

"From the first years here the Losail Circuit has been improving a lot," the Spaniard added, mainly in loose reference to improvements in infrastructure and viewing facilities. "The relationship we have is fantastic and they have big plans to improve."

Losail will be a part of MotoGP until 2026 with a new ten year contract coming into place from 2017 and the Federation still have the goal to promote and encourage an athlete from the region to break into the Grand Prix ranks (the QMMF have their own GP team). "We are not satisfied yet and we want someone at the highest level, so we want to build a platform," commented new President Abdulrahman Al Mannai. Plans to expand the usage of Losail were talked about with the track opening for more activities like running and cycling and more local motorsport events.

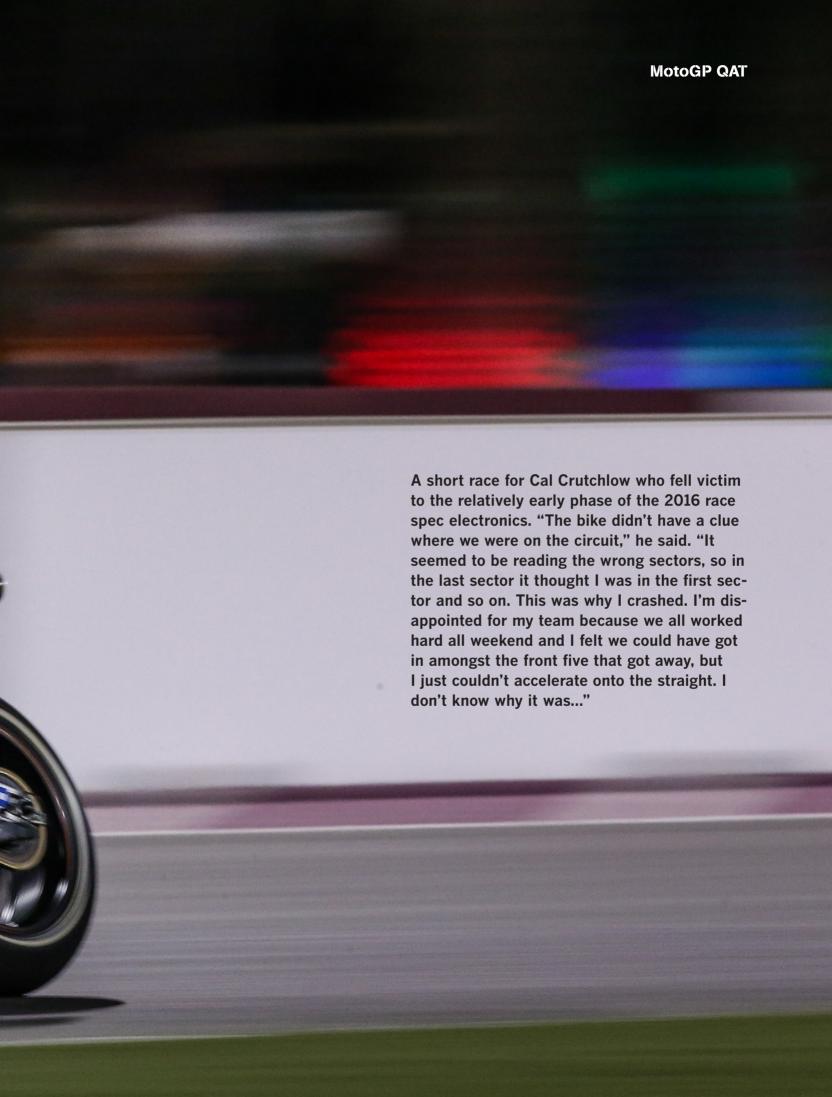




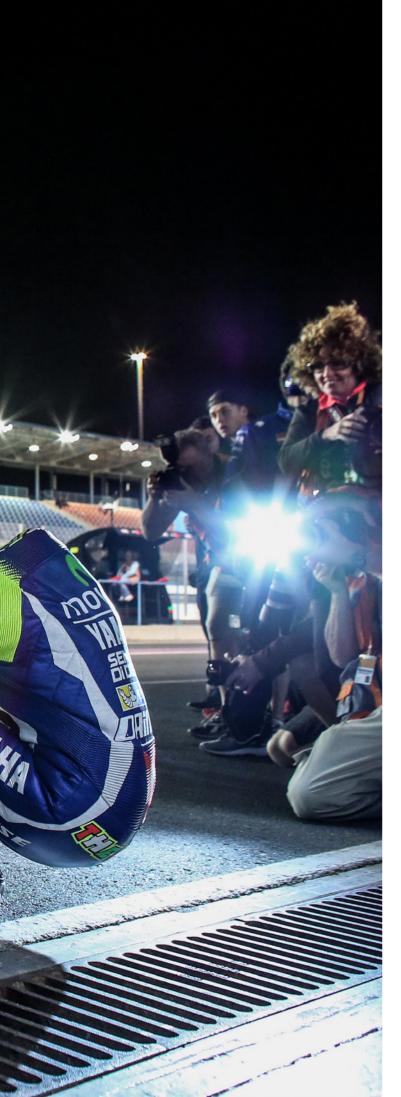
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ROSSI'S DOUBLE AND BRAD'S ORANGE

It seems remarkable that contracts for 2017 and beyond were already being confirmed and announced before the first round of 2016. Bradley Smith took the initiative to make public his ejection from the Tech3 team (later and confusingly refuted by Team Manager/Owner Herve Poncharal) via a column on MotoGP.com and the 25 year old continued a plan of revelation by breaking the news on his KTM deal to our own Gavin Emmett live on BT Sport. It will be interesting to see how the relationship and dynamic for Smith will turn out through the season, even if the team and rider are wholly professional it is an odd situation, so early and it was hardly a surprise to hear that teammate Pol Espargaro was pulled into a meeting with Lin Jarvis on Thursday and after Smith's first declaration.

For KTM it is a shrewd investment with an athlete capable of reaching the fringes of the winner's circle and not yet at his peak of experience and form. Current development rider Mika Kallio might be a wise backup for the first season to transition information gleaned through a year of riding laps alone and getting to know the Austrian RC16.

Fans and observers will debate the early proclamation over Rossi's Yamaha renewal that will take the Italian up to a fortieth year still as a MotoGP racer and almost a quarter of a century scheming Grand Prix success. Jorge Lorenzo will carry the spotlight as champion and race winner to Argentina but he will also have the heat in terms of his future plans. "We wanted to try and advance the contract before the first race and it wasn't possible but maybe it gives us more time to reflect in the next couple of weeks," he said ominously while talking to Spanish press after the official press conference on Wednesday. Lorenzo allegedly has not accepted a Yamaha offer despite making public comments that he wants to end his career in blue. How will this have changed after Qatar and with Rossi - with whom he clashed on Saturday over a pitlane exit (and some handbag dangling) - now part of the firmament for another two terms?

BUTTONING IT...

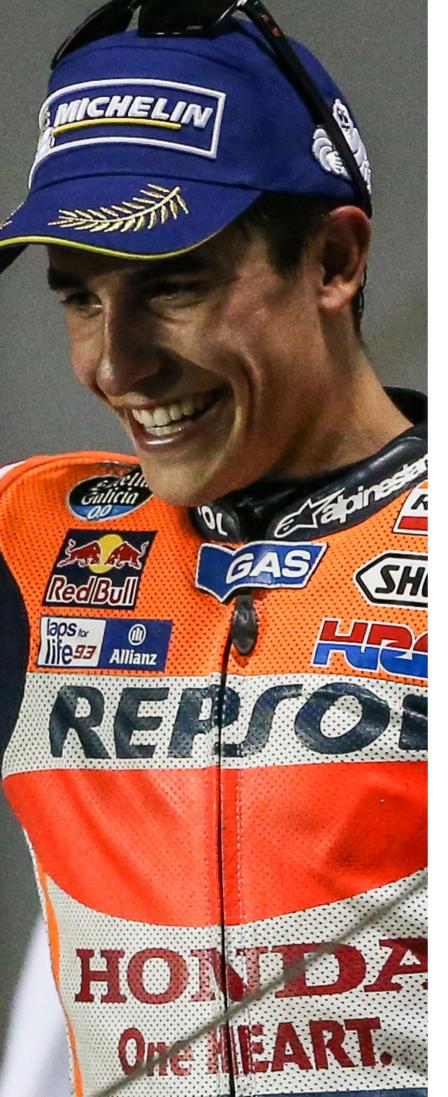
There was a blank reaction in the official press conference on Wednesday when a panel of riders were asked to comment on the revised regulations that forbade members of the paddock from bringing the sport into disrepute via their public words and statements. Jorge Lorenzo initially drew a blank but when explained about the jist of the changes was unequivocal in his opinion. "I think it is good. We are all 'living' because of MotoGP so we have to protect our sport," he said. It is commonly believed that the rules have been tweaked to prevent teams or brands from launching derisory accusations...rather than noosing the riders themselves. "I know about the changes, but in the end, until you see an example then you don't know if it will be better or worse," said Marc Marquez. "This is like soccer: there are always many opinions and people agree and disagree. We will see how it works."



"We need to see if things are working on the new scale and then can judge if it is working or not," opined Dani Pedrosa while Valentino Rossi backed up his own approach from Valencia 2015 in which he outlined his belief in a conspiracy against his championship challenge with half a smile and a twinkle in his eye. "You can explain what you think in a polite way," the Italian remarked. Andrea lannone was more succinct in terms of the impact on riders that is unlikely to muzzle many...Pol Espargaro's gripes against the suitability of his M1 an example of a rider happy to voice his concerns. "Whether I like the rules or not I don't have the potential to change them and it is the same for everyone," said lannone.







STILL TURNING-AND-BURNING FOR MARQUEZ

"Do you think Hector Barbera is faster than Marc Marquez? Cos I don't..." Cal Crutchlow was blunt in his assessment of how general work was progressing in tests at Qatar and the Englishman would be proved correct as the former double champion and his HRC crew performed an admirable turnaround from a position where the Catalan was understeering, complaining of corner entry and even crashing to one where he was the leading RCV rider and almost grabbed second spot through an aggressive and exciting last corner move against Dovizioso on Sunday. The 23 year old was competitive despite claiming before the GP that Losail was "one of the worst tracks for us."

"If the base we have works here and also in Argentina then I think we will be ready to fight for the championship and we'll have a good weapon," Marquez said on Friday evening (we're unsure if fingers were crossed behind his back). "But if we have to change many things at every track then it will be much more complicated. We are working but if you ask me now I wont know what to say because we don't know!"

Marquez will be assured after Losail and further work in Argentina could see the electronic ills of Honda fantastically reversed to allow '93' to be a genuine force once more. If the racebike is capable then will Marquez have eased-up his attacking approach in the favour of a more cautious strategy? With both wheels sliding at Losail and some centimetre-perfect overtaking moves on Valentino Rossi and Andrea Dovizioso it would seem little has altered. "I have changed, but not so much!" he said. "I continue braking late into the corners but I think the

"I have changed, but not so much!" he said. "I continue braking late into the corners but I think the qualifying lap is something I am still struggling with and finding the strong point of the Michelins."

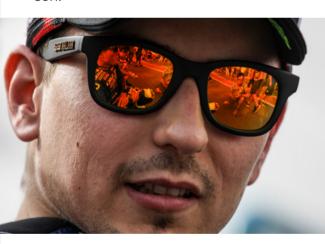
"I learned last year but it is also difficult!" he added.
"I want to take experience from what happened last season...but you also have to take risks! To try and win races because those fives points at the end of a championship could be vital. If you can find a bike on which you feel comfortable then life is much easier."



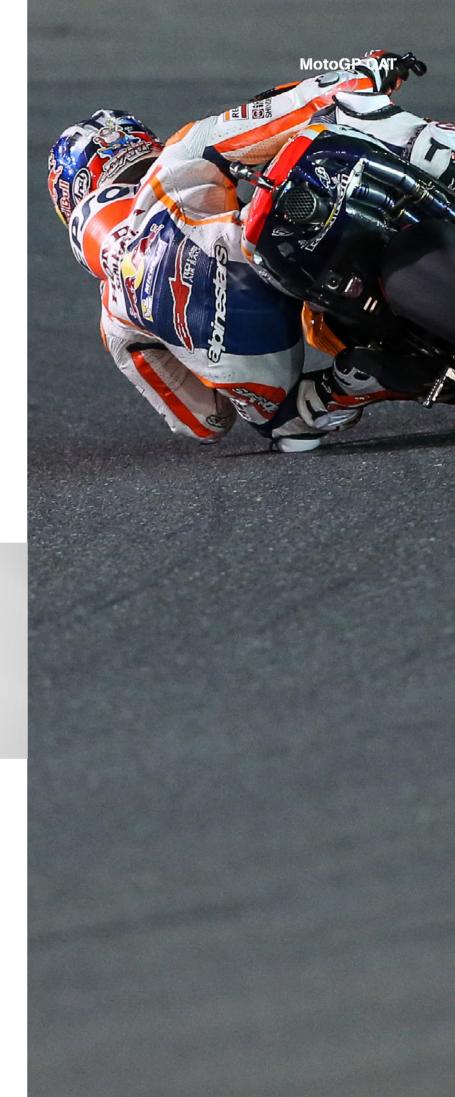


VANISHING VALENCIA

The last time MotoGP ordered into rank and file on a start grid was the pressure-boiler of Valencia in November. Five months later and some of the tensions from that epic closer to 2015 were barely traceable...but still felt. Moronic fans (from the smallest attendance of the season) were compelled to boo Marquez and Lorenzo on the podium and the factory Movistar Yamaha riders themselves squabbled on Saturday and then derided the other to press afterwards. "A lot of people before said it was the race of the century, afterwards I don't know, but I am very glad about what I did," said Lorenzo when asked what he thought Valencia had done for MotoGP and what the experience had meant to him. "The last races of last year saw something different to normal and, personally speaking, the finish can be different and better," conceded Rossi. "For sure I prefer to win than to lose. But it is like this, it is in the past and we hope to have a good fight this season."



Marc Marquez, who copped a lot of flak for timing his attack on Jorge Lorenzo at the wrong time in Spain, elected to leave Valencia where it is – in the past – while Dani Pedrosa was at least able to explain how the sport benefitted from a climax that is unlikely to be repeated any time soon, even if some of the rivalry could rise again in the fixtures to come. "It was a big moment for MotoGP," the Repsol Honda man said. "A lot of fans and the track was super-crowded. They had to put extra grandstands and sell extra tickets. This was clearly a positive thing then there is a result that is part of the show. We can say, overall, that MotoGP did grow."



GIVE ME WINGS...

One of the most talked about and aesthetic evolutions to MotoGP have been the elongated protrusions from fairings, already tagged 'winglets' with Ducati (lannone) doubling up, Yamaha (only Lorenzo) getting in the act and Honda also dabbling. Debate has already started over the practical worth (wheelies? downforce?) and the connotations for safety (turbulence, sharp edges) and opinions were sought-after at Losail.

"Those things are radical but they are in the rules," said Cal Crutchlow who also chatted about further ramifications. "I cannot say too much because we might need them! But...imagine if one of those sliced someone's leg clean open? They [the engineers] say it will break before [that happens] but how do they know? When I knocked Dovi off last year I still don't know whether I touched the wing or his handlebar. You couldn't really see from the video."

"It is creating turbulence when you are behind or when they pass," said Dani Pedrosa. "You lose control on the front and it starts shaking. Now everyone more or less is getting winglets."

"The turbulence behind them is out of control," continued Crutchlow. "It is unreal. I was behind Pedrosa at Phillip Island who was behind lannone and I honestly thought he was going to fly off it in sixth gear. He had a shake on and then came out of the bubble."

"I don't like the wings in general because they are quite ugly!" said Rossi. "More especially because I don't feel the difference. It is also true that at high speed it can cause a lot of turbulence so when you follow a bike with big wings then yours loses stability. I will try [them] another time to understand."

"You just bolt them on and we have just one type," revealed Bradley Smith, who crashed on the first day and ended up carrying a part of the fairing back through the gravel. "I think it is the type of thing you play with in FP3 or 4." Jorge Lorenzo was a little vague with his explanation for the vast black additions to the M1: "It's relative. It could be that the wings cost us a bit of speed but then we gain in other aspects."

With riders like Rossi claiming that the switch with electronics is like stepping back into the past, the attention to aerodynamics is the result of the brains of MotoGP trying to rally against the limitations of the rulebook. Iannone's Ducati carries an imposing form and some of the TV images on Sunday night showed the wings perilously near to gaining contact in the close company of Dovizioso and Marquez. How far can these innovations go and will there ultimately be a limit in terms of sizing or shape? As Crutchlow himself exudes winglets are an answer to a question and could easily arrive in another aspect as development forges ahead: "I'm not against them because, well, anything for an advantage."





SKY RACING VR46 TEAM PRESENTATION...

The recent agreement between Valentino Rossi's VR46 academy and Yamaha was the first clue that the Italian was not quite done with racing (and the Japanese manufacturer), even if he did initially claim he would review his future after the first five-six rounds of the 2016 campaign. Yamaha and the academy - that provided at least four protagonists in the Moto2 and Moto3 disputes at Qatar - will bond for three years in an arrangement that will extend beyond provision of bikes and support to PR help, tuition and career evolution.

The academy is the offshoot of Rossi's establishment of the 'Motor Ranch' as one of the go-to places in motorcycle racing and his VR46 merchandising and fan club empire that apparently employs a small fleet of staff. The academy, set-up in 2014, boasts eleven members with Rossi at the crest and taking an active role in the development of the youngsters under his watch, particularly those in the Sky Racing Team VR46 that was recently launched for 2016 with a roster of Romano Fenati, debutant talent Nicolo Bulega and Andrea Migno and managed by former GP winner Pablo Nieto.

'After five victories and a total of nine podium finishes in two seasons, the Sky Racing Team VR46 is ready to back on track with three riders: Fenati for winning, Migno for growing and Bulega for learning,' explained the 2016 press release on the Italian set-up running KTM RC250 machinery and backed by the broadcasting giant (that transmit all the races live in Italy and are one of the biggest networks in terms of presence in the MotoGP paddock).

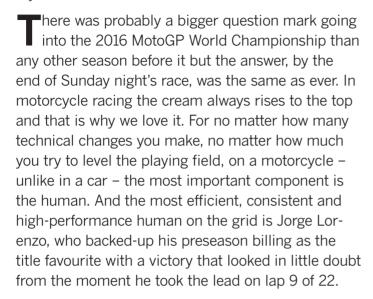
Bulega impressed at Losail while Fenati carried his role as team leader during the Moto3 sprint until a mistake dropped him from the front of the group to fourth. "The Sky Racing Team VR46 is a second family, we race, we work hard, but we have also time for laughing," the 20 year old said at the launch. "I feel like the older brother! This year there is a bigger responsibility...the time has come. I'm ready. It will be a competitive Championship."





WITNESS A MASTER...

By Matthew Roberts



With clear track in front of him, Lorenzo hit his stride at the halfway stage, clocking a 1'55.375 on lap 11 of 22 that incredibly he followed with an unerring 1.55.374 (just a thousandth of a second difference) on lap 12. Five of his next seven laps were 55.3s before he posted the fastest time of the race (1'54.927) on lap 20. Andrea Dovizioso managed a couple of 55.3s and a best lap of 1'55.149 on lap sixteen and whilst he was consistent in the mid 55s he could not find that crucial extra tenth consistently enough to keep in touch with the relentless Lorenzo.

It is this performance level, this degree of confidence and concentration, that separates the Mallorcan from his rivals on nights like this. Much like his title-winning performance at Valencia in November, when Lorenzo is on form he is flawless, and whilst he was quick to credit the soft Michelin rear tyre for his victory, the choice to run it was his and he employed it to perfection. It was a shame that perhaps the only man capable of stopping Lorenzo on Sunday night was watching the race from pit wall. After blitzing Dovizioso and Andrea lannone in testing, one can only wonder what kind of a challenge Casey Stoner might have presented on that Ducati in the race. Hopefully we'll find out before the end of the season - I have an optimistic feeling we might.

In a fleeting interview with BT Sport's Neil Hodgson just moments after the chequered flag, Davide



Tardozzi's frustration with the result was palpable. Ducati's bright hope for the future lannone had thrown his chances into the dark void of the gravel trap at turn thirteen, whilst for the umpteenth time in his career Dovizioso played second fiddle to Lorenzo. Not to disrespect or deny the undoubted talent of Dovi, but the crucial difference here was not in the machinery or the tyres but in the riders. If it is true that Tardozzi and Ducati are preparing a renewed bid for Lorenzo, their resolve will only have been strengthened on Sunday night.

Of course, Lorenzo was right in paying homage to Michelin, who for all their teething problems on their return to premier-class motorcycle racing have produced a tyre capable of such pace and consistency. Lorenzo's race time was over seven seconds faster than Rossi last year, meaning the Michelins have not only complemented the improvements made by Yamaha but also Ducati and Honda, who also had riders cross the line inside Rossi's 2015 time.

For all Lorenzo's brilliance on track in Qatar there will sadly be some people more interested in the news that Valentino Rossi has signed a new two-year contract to stay in MotoGP with the factory Yamaha team. This has been widely received as great news for the sport, of course, and in theory it is hard to argue with the logic of re-signing the man who finished second in the World Championship last season, but in the cut-throat world of motorcycle racing surely even a legend like Rossi, at 37, has to prove his worth on a yearly basis.

I am not privy to the negotiations behind closed doors at Yamaha but it seems bizarre to me that whilst Lorenzo continues to prove himself as the standout rider in MotoGP, he might be allowed to leave whilst Rossi stays. From this distance it gives the impression that Rossi is their priority and I just wonder if Lorenzo feels that has always been the case despite his achievements. As the handful of brainless idiots that booed him onto the podium on Sunday night proved, sometimes even being the best is not good enough for everybody.



Having gathered attention and the loose notes of people fancying a flutter on an 'outsider' for Qatar during tests, Scott Redding can feel a little underwhelmed by tenth place at Losail; a result achieved after two crashes on the way to a qualifying spot down on the fourth row of the grid from where he did not launch well on Sunday night. The Brit spent the race chasing brandmate Hector Barbera. "After the tests we thought we were in good shape but obviously we were missing something," he said. "Before the race I would have accepted a Top 8 or Top 10 in light of this difficult weekend and in the end we hit the goal. We can learn from this race, even from the start where I was not brilliant, losing some positions. What I would like in Argentina? To find back the feeling of the test."







LESSONS FROM QATAR...

By David Emmett

The first race since the revolution in MotoGP is in the bag. Gone are the excessively complex adaptive electronics and super-sticky Bridgestone tyres, replaced by slightly simpler electronics and super-sticky Michelin tyres. So how has MotoGP changed? Not very much, is the short answer. The long answer (and I am much better at long answers than at short ones) is not very much, but more than immediately meets the eye. What have we learned? Below are the main lessons from Qatar.

New rules, same results

There is much muttering among a certain section of fans that MotoGP is somehow rigged. The parties guilty of such rigging vary depending on the particular proclivities of the fans making the accusations, but the two favourite targets are Honda and Dorna. The charge is that there are only four bikes on the grid capable of winning a race – to wit, the Repsol Hondas and Movistar Yamahas – and that those in charge are conspiring to keep it so.

Such fans saw their deepest prejudices confirmed by the first race under MotoGP's new regulations. The top five finishers consisted of the two factory Yamahas and the two Repsol Hondas, with a factory Ducati thrown in for good measure. That Ducati should do well at Losail is hardly a surprise, the Bologna factory having a long history of strong results here. The only real surprise was that Dani Pedrosa finished so far behind Jorge Lorenzo, Andrea Dovizioso, Marc Márquez and Valentino Rossi, the Repsol man crossing the line fourteen seconds after Lorenzo had taken the chequered flag.

Is MotoGP rigged in favour of the factories? It depends on your point of view. Motorcycle racing is an expensive sport, and so money can make a difference. The factories have the budgets to spend on success, and they use that money effectively. They have the best possible version of their own bikes, of course, but much more than that, they can pay the

best crew chiefs in the paddock to look after them, and pay the best mechanics to work on them. They can also afford to spend big on data engineers, putting smart brains behind laptops to analyse the many gigabytes of information that modern datalogging systems produce. All this allows factories to offer the best riders in the world a competitive package, one capable of winning races, and a very handsome pay packet to go along with it. I suspect that most riders would happily ride for nothing as long as they had a shot at winning races, but racers being the competitive beasts that they are, the size of their salaries becomes yet another area in which to outdo one another.

So for Lorenzo, Márquez, Rossi and Pedrosa all to finish in the top five is hardly a surprise. They are the best riders in the world, on the best bikes, in the best teams. If you were to put the entire MotoGP field on identical Vespa scooters, then the four men who have finished top four in the championship for the past three years would almost certainly cross the line first. Allow them to take their teams along to fettle their Vespas, and you can guarantee it.

There were signs of hope that the hegemony of the so-called Aliens is at least starting to show cracks. Both Ducatis were clearly competitive - and fast, Andrea Dovizioso clocking in at over 350 km/h, setting a new official record top speed - the combination of Michelins and spec electronics reducing the advantage of the Hondas and Yamahas. Dovizioso finished second, and if Andrea lannone had not touched a white line and crashed, he too could have challenged for a podium. Dovizioso discounted the fact that they were strong at Qatar last year as a factor in the result. "The reality is not Qatar last year, you have to look at the end of the season," he told the press conference. Dovizioso struggled badly at the end of 2015, but the Ducati Desmosedici is a much better bike this year. The two Andreas may yet be much more of a factor in 2016.



Suzuki, too, showed signs of progress. Last year, Aleix Espargaro finished nearly twenty seconds behind the winner, and behind a bunch of satellite bikes. On Sunday, Maverick Viñales crossed the line fifteen seconds behind the winner, in a race which was seven seconds faster than in 2015. Viñales finished sixth, only the factory Hondas, Yamahas and remaining Ducati ahead of him, and a second behind Dani Pedrosa. The gap is smaller, but it is still there.

Testing is not racing

The size of the gap between Viñales' Suzuki GSX-RR and the podium was much larger than expected. In both testing and during practice, Viñales had been much faster, finishing third at the test and qualifying on the front row of the grid. But in FP4, the one session of practice where the result does not count towards qualifying, Viñales finished eighth, seven tenths off the pace of Jorge Lorenzo. In the race, Viñales lapped pretty much at the same pace as he had in FP4, as did Lorenzo. Divide Viñales' gap in the race by 21 laps and you get seven tenths of a second.

Viñales was not the only victim of the hype generated by testing. The satellite Ducatis had made a real impression, Scott Redding, Danilo Petrucci, Hector Barbera, even Loris Baz posting surprising times. In the race, normal order was restored, Barbera finishing as best satellite Ducati in ninth, just ahead of Redding.

The results of testing may not accurately reflect the results of the race, but they may have a material influence upon them. Two weeks before the race at Qatar, the MotoGP field spent three days testing at the track, making their final adjustments ahead of the season. The series now heads to Argentina, a track where they have not tested, and so have no set up data with the new rules. That will catch one or two teams out, though once again, the support infrastructure of the factory teams mean they can throw more resources at trying to fix any anomalies they find. Somebody, however, is going to get it horribly wrong.

Black, round, and impressive

That somebody could be Michelin. The one time Michelin tested at the Argentinian track, they lost a lot of time to rain, as they did in Austin. Argentina is

a very tough track on tyres, as it is the second fastest circuit on the calendar. It would be easy for Michelin to get their tyre allocation wrong at the track.

They got it absolutely right at Qatar, however. There was a lot of praise for the Michelin, and not just as a result of the new rules imposed over the winter banning "irresponsible statements" by teams and riders. Valentino Rossi summed up the general feeling. "Michelin did a good job," he told reporters after the race. "I think that now, tyres are a little bit different, but the way to ride the bike is not so different." The Michelin rear is a lot better than the old Bridgestone rear, but most impressive is the amount of progress the French tyre maker has made with the front. "During the last part of the race I was able to brake quite hard with a lot of angle, so that was really good," said Andrea Dovizioso. Marc Márquez, whose riding style is even more extreme than late braker Dovizioso, was equally impressed. "I'm pushing a lot on entry, sliding. I'm braking the same or maybe later than Bridgestone." There were still a fair few crashes at Qatar, but only Loris Baz going down was attributable to overriding the front.

The best news, though, was that all of the compounds that Michelin brought to Qatar could be raced. Both front and rear, the hard and soft compounds were equally capable of lasting the distance. The top four finishers used a variety of combinations of hard and soft tyres, front and rear. With the Bridgestones, there was usually only one compound at either end of the bike which would work. The ability to choose different compounds offers riders an opportunity to exploit tyres in different ways, find different ways of going fast. The fact that the top four finished within two-and-a-half seconds of each other different combinations of tyres proves that those choices can all be equally fast.

What can we say about the 2016 season after the first race? In truth, all we can say is that the season is only one race old. That the top should stay at the top is hardly surprising, nor that a new tyre company should come in determined to do a good job. There is still a lot of racing left before Valencia, and plenty of time for surprises.







BOO BLOG...

By Gavin Emmett

As opening nights of the MotoGP World Championship go, it's a fair comment to say there have been better. Not that the Qatari GP was a complete let-down by any stretch, but the big shake-up we were anticipating amidst the established MotoGP order never quite materialised, and the Moto2 race produced the kind of farce that club-level amateurs would have been embarrassed by.

Topping it off was a disappointing crowd, who from where I was standing turned up in fewer numbers than had done so even in the searing heat of the early events at Losail - whatever the official figures may say. Making it worse, a large majority of those who had graced the desert venue with their presence then promptly booed virtually every rider on the grid barring you-know-who.

As much as I'm not a fan of the trip to Qatar, with question marks surrounding migrant-worker rights and a fairly soulless venue in Losail, I do also appreciate the value to the series of a visit to the Middle East. The track layout generally makes for decent racing, despite its flatness, and it is the only stop for the championship in the region. Perhaps most importantly the exorbitant rights fee the organisers pay to host the opening race of the year effectively subsidises the costs for some of the more classic venues on the calendar. It also looks pretty special under lights!

I was stood alongside Eugene Laverty on the MotoGP grid as he went through his pre-race routine and strategised with crew chief Phil Marron. At the same time the circuit announcer was taking the assembled throng through the runners and riders. Starting from pole, Jorge Lorenzo's name was greeted with a cacophony of jeers and whistles, swiftly followed by much the same treatment for Marc Marquez. Unfathomable as that already was as far as I was concerned, there were then boos for several other riders too, mainly the Spaniards. So much so, that when the Northern Irishman's name was read out and he received a murmur of approval and a spattering of cheers, he raised both a chuckle and one eyebrow, suggesting it could have been so much worse.

I know I'm not the only one who is concerned by this. In a past blog I likened the atmosphere at some events to that of a football match, and the tribalism is starting to leave a sour taste in many people's mouths. I don't want to tell people how they should show their support, but just imagine it gets too much like soccer, where so-called fans are throwing things onto the field of play. I have actually witnessed fans attempting it at both Jerez and Le Mans in the past, but thankfully the beer bottles landed short of even the gravel traps. We're not talking about getting a cut on the head as we might be at Old Trafford or Stamford Bridge, the riders are putting their lives on the line here, and they all deserve the utmost respect.

I have to give credit to the boss of the VR46 Fan Club Flavio Fratesi. He spoke to the press this weekend to make it clear to all those buying tickets through the organisation, for their various reserved grandstands around the world this year, that all riders were to be respected, naming Marquez in particular as one who had suffered abuse by unwelcome members.

Something more needs to be done, however. Whether it's a case of Rossi standing up and making a statement himself, or the organisers reinforcing positive messages about all the riders, it is bringing the sport into disrepute. The opening night of the championship and the fanfare for its restart were marred by this despicable behaviour which was broadcast to the world.

I had originally thought I would focus this blog on the Moto2 jump-start fiasco, but I think it is clear for all to see that there was a massive error in judgement. Race Director Mike Webb has pointed out that there was a failure in the 500 frames-per-second camera system which sits on each of the rows and automatically hands out penalties (Sam Lowes reckons he received the dashboard warning about his jump start in the first corner!). Mike added that he had to use the same standards to judge everyone, so had to wait for the system to come back online before being able to punish Morbidelli and Cortese.

My problem with that is that the whole world could see with standard 24 frames-per-second broadcast cameras that Frankie had jumped the start by a full bike length. Yes, let's use technology, but let's not ignore common sense at the same time.

The same goes for the penalty itself. 20 seconds may be the standard if a ride-through hasn't been called in time (four laps from the start) but it cost the highest-placed "ride-throughers" Rins and Lowes approximately 24 and 26 seconds respectively. They both finished under two seconds behind Morbidelli when the sums were done. Not to mention time lost riding through slower traffic. At some tracks with long pit lanes, this disparity could be even higher. Race Direction have changed the penalty point rules over the winter to allow themselves to be more flexible and rational, why not do the same in these instances?





ANSWER

Noted apparel brands offer a comprehensive range of riding kit and Answer is no different. Aside from the renowned shirt, pants and gloves the American company also have performance underlayers. The Evaporator comes in long and short versions for the top and bottom half of the body and are reasonably priced around the thirty-dollar mark. Answer claim that the Evaporator has 'high quality, durable, moisture wicking fabrics that manage body temperature while keeping you dry and comfortable throughout your motos and trail rides.' The fabric is 50% lighter than cotton and the shorts/pants have increased support (meaning it is tight!) that also helps towards muscle fatigue. We highlighted Virus Performance recently and their vast range but Answer would be a wise choice specific to moto and riding. The shirt absorbs moisture while on the bike and has 'spun fabric construction with wicking and anti-bacterial treatments...a reactive moisture transfer system that keeps the body cooler and dryer than cotton. After 60 minutes of exercise the Evaporator fabric releases 80% of its moisture after 30 minutes of rest. Cotton releases only 40% after the same amount of time.'

Ask about the Evaporator at Answer stockists







AVAILABLE IN 2 COLORWAYS

ANSR





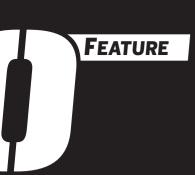




RESET, REFRESH, GOAGAIN

PERFORMANCE ISSUES AND EVEN CONTRACT GOSSIP FILL COLUMN INCHES AT THE FRONT OF THE MotoGP FIELD BUT THERE ARE OTHER STORIES AND HARSHER REALITIES FURTHER BACK IN THE PACK. EUGENE LAVERTY'S STRUGGLE AGAINST ADVERSITY IN 2015 WITH AN UNCOMPETITIVE PRODUCTION HONDA COULD FINALLY BE PUT TO BED WITH THE NEW-SEASON REGULATIONS THAT HAVE BROUGHT THE MotoGP ELITE SLIGHTLY CLOSER TO EACH OTHER AND WITH THE PROPENSITY FOR SURPRISES STILL IN THE AIR WITH JUST ONE ROUND OF EIGHTEEN IN THE BAG. WE CHATTED WITH '50' BEFORE THE GRAND PRIX AND THEN DURING THE LOSAIL NIGHTS TO GET A GAUGE ON WHAT IT IS LIKE TO NEGOTIATE MotoGP WITHOUT THE VAST POTENTIAL OF FACTORY EQUIPMENT...





he 29 year old Irishman went through a spin of emotions at Qatar. Only two weeks previously the former World Superbike race winner turned up in the desert with a thirst; knowing he was already in a race to find full fitness and comfort on the new Aspar Desmosedici. Once into the Grand Prix timetable then he battled technical problems looking very downcast after the second day of practice on Friday - and unwittingly an older engine spec. Laverty finally turned it around with the help of the Ducati 14.2, a strong lap in qualification and a personal best finish of twelfth on Sunday night. It was something of a vindication for Eugene's relentless efforts that stretch back almost twelve months and his first frustrated outings with the RCV1000R.

We wanted to know what it was like in MotoGP when the odds are often sheer and immediate from the moment a rider takes his place outside the first three-four rows of the grid. Laverty might finally be in a position to gather recognition and plaudits in 2016 but that certainly wasn't the case last season. What is it like dealing with that change?

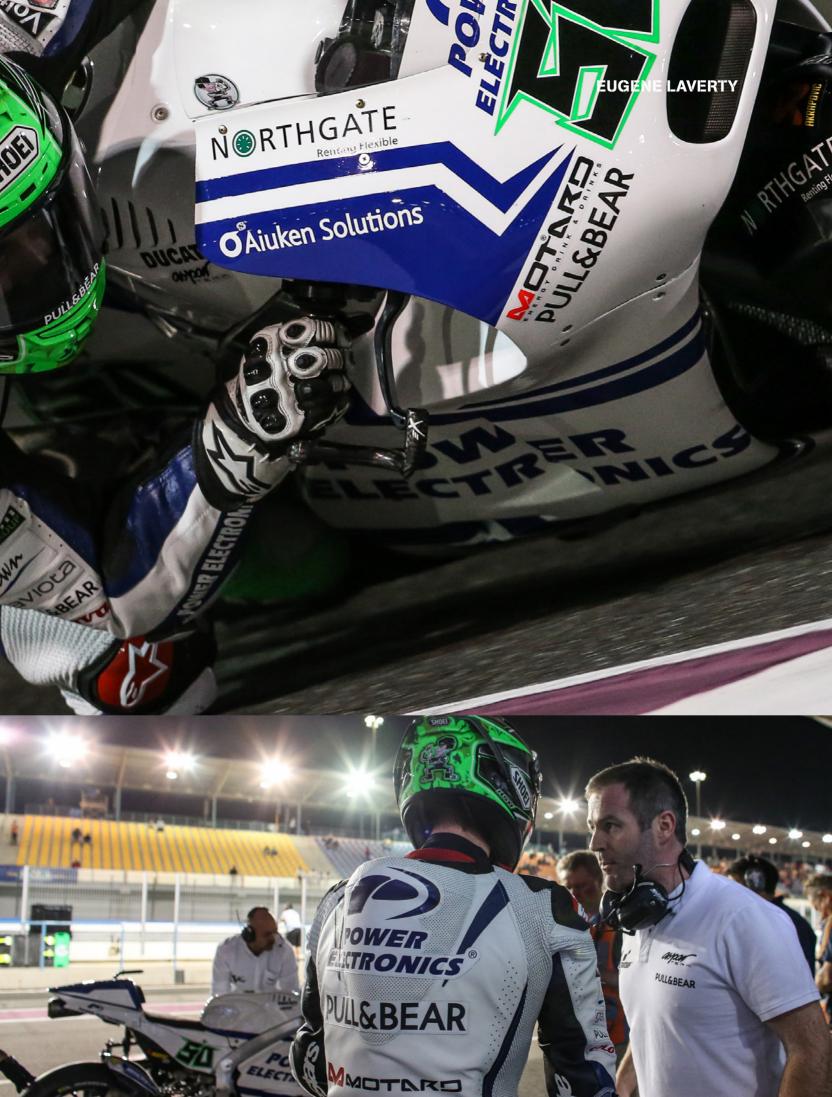
OK, so the Grand Prix is yet to happen and we're in Qatar getting ready to go. Can you try and put a status on where you are and how you feel?

I haven't been able to have a good run on the bike so with the electronics we have been running behind the others unfortunately, even if the other Ducatis team has been making progress but I still don't feel comfortable. We made some discoveries after Phillip Island but the priority has been to make the bike rideable [for me] because it is more than capable.



What is your mindset? There must be a jumble of expectations...

It is good that things have changed for every-body and it looks like different tracks will suit different riders. It is going to be more interesting at the front. I had to adapt last year and [because of that] you might think that I can adapt quickly again but it is strange. I was able to push the tyres hard last year and I was building up through the season, now suddenly I have to change completely and it is like starting over again. At least everyone else has to do it also and they had been using those tyres [Bridgestones] for a lot of years so it is tricky for them too.





How does that affect your drive for a new season? Without having any circumstances with which to orientate yourself...?

The positive thing for me was seeing the progress of the Avintia guys in the tests and seeing them right up there in Phillip Island gives me cause for optimism. Last year Nicky [Hayden] and I were riding the wheels off our bikes at some rounds – the best I have ridden – and we were just fighting for points. With this bike we would have had a shot at being closer to the front. At the same time it is frustrating because we are not there yet. Frustration only leads to crashes so we have to be done with that.

When you had the downtime after 2015 – getting married also – did you sit back and think 'nine points is not what I expected from MotoGP'?

It definitely made it difficult...those points I had on the board. The Open Honda was supposed to be a step up from the previous year but unfortunately it did not really materialise. There were getting regular points-scoring finishes but last year was even more difficult for Nicky and I. It was luck of the draw I guess. You will never really know. I came to MotoGP because I wanted to ride the Open Honda and get a step closer to a factory machine but the gap was still too big.

How do you feel about your place in MotoGP? Do you feel like waving and saying 'don't forget about me guys: I'm riding well'...

Yeah, last year it was like that because I was riding well. I'm being patient and I'm saying 'don't forget me' because hopefully in the first few rounds I can show what I am capable of. Last year I had some great rides; in Aragon I was fourteenth but it felt like a race win.

Can you describe what it is like to be on that grid and seeing those riders ahead of you knowing there was a limit to what you can achieve? It must have been frustrating...

Yeah it was frustrating. You can see the difference on a timesheet but when you are on track you can see that you are perhaps even strong-

er than the guys who are lapping a second faster than you so it is difficult to fathom. I've won a lot of Superbike races so I know how to ride a motorbike. This game is about getting everything out of the team, the bike, the rider and to gel as one.

Do you think other teams and power-players in the paddock are noticing your work?

Hmmm, no. I think it is human nature that you look at the race winners and I've learned that in my career. I used to believe that if you go and exceed expectations on given machinery then you will get recognised but that is not the case in motorsport unfortunately and the only thing that counts is winning races. I learned that when I went 250 Grand Prix racing and that's why I switched to Supersport and Superbike and every move after that was with a bike that I believed would let me show my potential. It was also the reason why I came to MotoGP and hoped the Open Honda - with the soft tyres - could qualify on the front two rows and get recognised. It doesn't matter if you are fighting for the Open class win in fourteenth or fifteenth...it is still fourteenth or fifteenth!

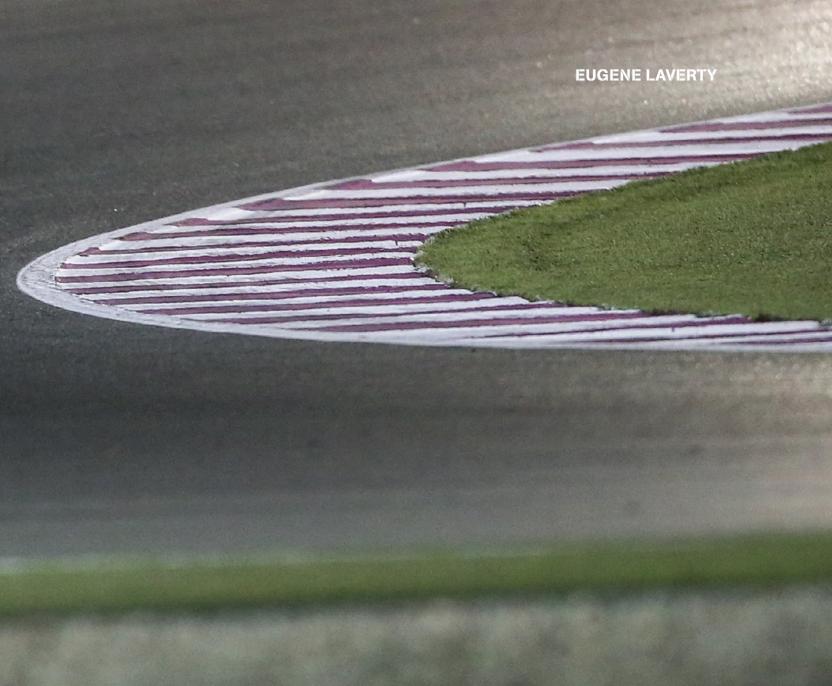
Is the hard bit also that people might look for 'younger' and elsewhere – like Moto2 - rather than through the field of MotoGP?

That's always gonna happen and guys coming through is just part of sport. Look at Rossi; he reinvented himself when maybe there were other riders pushing through. He has reinstated himself as a race winner. I'm certainly not comparing myself to Rossi by any means but it shows that you always have to work to improve because there are always younger kids.

Reinventing yourself: is that something you can do?

Adapting my riding style has always been one of my big positives and a reason why I have had success on different bikes in Superbike. Last year I felt that the Open Honda really suited my style and I rode it well. I'm still to learn the correct way with this one [the Ducati] but that will come with laps. That's my focus.





Coming into the second year is it still quite a buzz being part of this series?

Yeah, I came to MotoGP because I wanted to fight against the best riders in the world. I enjoyed my time in Superbike as well and there are some incredible riders there too and perhaps under-rated ones. I wanted to come here and fight on prototype machinery and do the fastest two-wheeled laps in the world and that essentially is what we are doing. It is a different paddock and surroundings for sure but when I'm part of it and racing it is less noticeable because you are in the routine of motorhome, truck, pit and hospitality. You are quite tunnel-visioned.

So we are right at the start of your second year, does that make it hard to get a handle on what direction the future might hold for you?

All the factory contracts are up this year and everyone will be going for them. I need to get myself comfortable and do what I know I am capable of, getting those results to show my potential. That's what we are all trying to do because there are only a select few seats.

The potential is there now...you just need to find the limits...

Yeah, and that's why I am optimistic. It has been frustrating with these crashes in tests but when I see the 14.2 Ducati ahead of factory bikes that's really positive because in the last few years that didn't really happen.









FEATURE

defy any motorcycling fan – active rider or not – to flick through Roland Sands' website and not find something that makes the finger hover. Of all the custom bike builders that pervade the wide Californian scene (and we visited a few) there isn't anyone who mixes the genres quite like RSD. The company also compliments their bike work with a wide and desirable line of apparel and memorabilia.

The 41 year old sits at the busy helm of RSD and from roots in the build business thanks to his father and a deep fascination with racing, initially on road racing asphalt (he was 250cc National champion) and up to the present day with flat track. We swiftly meet Roland after entering the door of a pristine shop, seemingly overstocked with parts, gear, photos, artwork and posters. It is a suitable immersion into the Sands experience and we are led past lined-up bikes of varying tyres and eras (cruisers to flattrackers), through a pristine workspace and up to Roland's office where DJ decks sit next to trophy, sketches, custom furniture, old lids and much more. It feels as much 'man cave' as hub of creativity and organisation.

It is not the biggest facility and curiosity is heightened over how RSD has made such an international impact from such modest roots. Through the glass walls of the office we see his former race bikes carrying a number 10 and it seems like a decent place to start, certainly an easy subject for breaking the ice. "Racing takes a certain type of focus but when I was racing I was also running the team and did a lot of the logistical stuff that was involved," he explains. "I got used to working hard and working whatever hours it took to get things done. It was a mentality I brought into my business; I want to win, I want to do a good job, failing is not really an option - just keep working and if something doesn't work-out then keep going until it does! Or move onto something better."







"Being a racer you have that 'never-say-die' attitude and just keep charging," the Californian from just down the road in Long Beach says. "If you crash you get back up and rebuild and go out again."

Sands was quick on the track – and still earns merit on an oval – but has been more prolific when it comes to his slant on motorcycles. The recent work with a Ducati Panigale has not reinvented the Italian masterpiece but turned a tasty piece of engineering into something utterly mouth-watering. Almost too nice to ride.

From winning races to building a successful design business: it is unusual for someone to be good at more than one thing...

It has been cool that way and I have been blessed with the opportunity to do the things that I do. And I took the opportunity you know? It didn't just appear. My Dad was a big mentor for me and showed what was possible with fabricating, manufacturing and design. I was designing so I could go racing back then, so design has always been there. When I quit racing I was able to focus on something different that I loved. Fortunately I can ride a motorcycle and in this industry respect is something hard earned. There is no quicker way to gain respect than through racing...unless you're a MotoGP racer where half the people love you and half hate you! I've been fortunate man...but we don't sit around and congratulate ourselves too much. Sometimes we'll look around at the end of the year and look around at what we've done and say 'good job' but then it's onto the next thing.

Back in '98 when you won that 250 title could you have envisaged having your own clothing line?

Not to the level we're doing! I'll probably look back in five years and think 'wow, it is crazy how it all happened' but to me it is still an ongoing project. I cannot sit there and think 'we're successful' if I did that then I'd end up going on vacation for a long time.

Has the whole operation turned into a monster?

Oh, for sure. We don't have a huge team here and we don't produce anything except custom bikes in this facility for consumers. We work with outside suppliers and manufacturers and our job is to make sure it is designed well and marketed well and maintains the brand.



Was there a bike that kicked everything off?

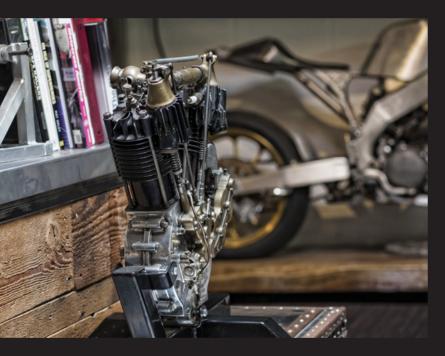
There have been different times where that has happened in my life. I kinda look back and think 'have we reached the pinnacle of what we do?' but we seem to make new moves and new partners every year. Last year was crazy because we built custom bikes with four-five OEMs. They were all big projects and all sideby-side. Nobody bitched or was angry about it, they all just wanted to be part of what we were creating. 2015 was a pinnacle moment [for the company] because we surpassed that need for an OEM to have creative limits and dictate what we do. When our brand is tied to a machine then it means something to people and something to the manufacturers. It means customisation and our stamp of approval on the machine, our flavour and our style and people seem to like it.





So no restrictions through any official affiliations?

I would say in half of the OEM projects that we do – fortunately – we get a lot of freedom. It is more like 'here is a sketch, are you guys cool with it?' and then we build it. There is not a lot of 'back and forth'. On other projects like building a concept bike for a brand then there will be a lot more...but with still a lot of freedom.



We've done stories at Powerplant and Deus Ex and the common frustration seems to be with having only twenty-four hours in the day. Time is the biggest enemy...

[smiles] Yeah! Success is a fickle beast. The better job you do – and I always try to underpromise and over-deliver as a general mentality – and you build a reputation for 'delivering' then you don't have these big questions any more. Big projects come and you've expected to do it all. Of course we have a big appetite and want to accomplish a lot of stuff. It is hard to say no. So we work ourselves to death sometimes!

Looking around there is a diverse spread here but is there anything that still needs to be tackled?

Of course...there are carcasses out there waiting to be built. Even the little Dakota Trials bike. It is a beautiful engine I want to work on. I also have Kawasaki triple, an H2, that is waiting to be turned into a road racer. I have an FXR I want to turn into a bagger. I'm just a lover of two wheels across the board. I would consider building for any genre. Motorcycles are my focus because that is where our business interests lie but I like to design anything and everything; houses, building, interior spaces, automobiles - I'm working on a vintage NASCAR right now - anything I feel I can put a spin on or add to the design equity of the world; I guess that is a weird statement...I don't know.

What's the NASCAR story?

It is that thing right there [points to a photo on the wall]. It is a '65 Galaxy. We started out building a vintage NASCAR but it has become more about what I traditionally do, so it has a modern motor, suspension and brakes and full slicks. It is modern race-spired. It is going to be bad. A 600 horsepower car and something I could potentially go and race at Pike's Peak.







What about influences?

Technology inspires me. Just getting this Wacom Pad and being able to get ideas down quickly was empowering and made a daunting task of designing something so much easier. Thanks to the internet I think it is easy to find inspiration these days whether going to a Blog or Instagram. There is immediate access and I think it is my job to be a filter for what is out there and saying 'this is what I like' if I am not creating something brand new.

Do you still get to the races or follow the action much?

I raced flat track last Sunday! I have a whole schedule for this year already and will be out there with those Indians. Flat track is so fun and racing those big stupid bikes is just insane. I watch supercross and for sure MotoGP but prefer to catch it at home where I can sit-down and enjoy them. They are full-on TV sports.

RSD seems to be growing as a business...is that just in line with custom bike building generally? The scene seems to be going through a boom. Are looking internationally?

Yeah the internet gives us this crazy outreach and we've always had this flow of projects hitting international magazines. I work with a few people who definitely get our ideas out there. We are fortunate because we get to work on a broad range of products and projects and it isn't just about one manufacturer and that spreads our reach massively; we get KTM fans, Yamaha fans, Ducati fans, Harley fans. The motorcycle industry is only so big right? So if you are only working on Harleys then that's your little piece of the custom 'pie' that people will enjoy. Whereas if you touch all of these brands then you open yourself up to the entire motorcycling public.

How does it work for the custom jobs? Do people come in and buy what you've already built? Or are there many spec jobs?

Man, it is different. Some people just coldcall or email. We get emails everyday about building bikes but we filter them because from those people maybe only 10% are serious or have the money to do it. Building a motorcycle from scratch is not a cheap thing! Every bike we build I put my energy into, and pay a lot of attention to them. If we build twenty bikes a year then that is already a lot. I do it because I love it...and it is not a huge money-maker! Some projects are...but the majority are not. It is more about doing what we love to do and keeping the business what is it about.



Lastly, what's in the garage?

Just look around here! I have a [Ducati] Superleggera at the house.

That's it?!

My house is small! I have a baby and her stuff takes up more space than I can believe. I have a two-car garage and live down by the beach so there is not a huge amount of space. But I am moving soon and it is primarily so I can have a bigger garage to put a bunch of bikes on charge and ready to go. This place here is a 'shop and it can be hard to wake up on a Sunday and come here for a bike to then go for a ride.

















SCOTT

Now that slightly warmer weather is coming into play with the end of March and winter, tackling those morning runs seems a little less harsh. We frequently feature Scott riding gear and goggle technology in OTOR but the company have a treasure-trove of products and apparel for outdoor pursuits. For running we actually have a pair of Kinabalu 3.0 Gore-Tex shoes. The design is lively but the shoe provides an impeccable fit. A slightly curved sole and a rigid lacing system are two of our favourite features and Scott sum up the description nicely with their promo text: 'The 11mm drop and eRide geometry provide a smooth and natural heel to toe transition. The grip will perform at its best on fast rolling trails and forestry single track. While a GORE-TEX® lined upper keep your foot protected from the elements.'

The Trail RUN loose fit shorts have an inner brief for support and three mesh pockets, and overall are a light and simplistic option. Moving up and the Trail RUN Crew short sleeve shirt handily comes with two small, integrated pockets, has a mesh construction on the back (thought out if carrying a bag like the Trail Pack Summit 8) and a earphone cable hole and fixing loop to stop any music lead flapping about. It comes in two colours.

To complete the set is the Trail MTN Dryo Plus jacket with Dryosphere (2-3 layer, waterproof, windproof and breathable) material, high-vis elements, laser cut ventilation zippers, an internal hood face shield for even more protection and enough pockets to store your map, keys, phone and other small belongings.

The Trail Pack Summit 8 is a slimmer version of the 16 model and 'the wide shoulder strap harness construction offers a perfect fit in the chest area and provides plenty of space for your nutrition and gear. The new mesh fabric creates small air channels that allow for a high breathability'. Spaces for a mobile device, hydration, bottles, poles, sunglasses and more make this a versatile option. Available in red and black.

All together the gear looks the business as well, and there are a numerous versions for ladies. For more information peruse through the Scott website at: www.scott-sports. com or just click on any of the links here

MX BLOG

DIFFERENT ANIMALS... By Adam Wheeler



hat do riders usually talk about on a race weekend? Or, more precisely, what are they asked? Covering the first days of both the MotoGP test (after MXGP) and the Grand Prix of Qatar last week it was interesting to chart just how much the technical side of the sport is a concern for so many. For fear of stating the obvious the veracity of a rider's set-up with his race bike is ultimately key to his performance and potential for results. Naturally a MotoGP athlete is bound to face enquiries as to tyre preference and duration, the formidability of his electronics and the all-round health of his corner speed. Sometimes they look particularly bored trying to describe the minute handling details of their machine - especially after having done it in two, or even three, languages. The depth of curiosity by the press and paddock people over these issues is also heightened by the new regs for 2016; it is a way for onlookers to try and rationalise and prepare for any surprises should a new winner emerge straight away or suddenly the time-honoured advantage of factory machines is really not that big at all (at least at the beginning of this new era).

In MXGP rubber is barely mentioned (and the premier class only features two brands with any real investment in the sport). Suspension is a subject that comes up quite a lot. Electronics? Not so much. Motocross' equivalent of tyre compounds as a talking point is the track. I've written many times that the layout is as much of a character at a Grand Prix as any rider. It is a shifting and organic entity that can alter in a moment. MotoGP has nowhere near the same kind of changing landscape. OK, temperatures can rise and fall, it could rain or asphalt can be resurfaced and sometimes a circuit will have been adjusted in terms of a corner or section - usually in the interests of safety. Teams will have banks of past data and analysis, times and recordings to sink into. MXGP has featured at least new facilities in the past five years and is wont to switching clubs and venues, especially in France. In MotoGP the first question a rider might face is over his tyre choice or experimentation and how it worked in

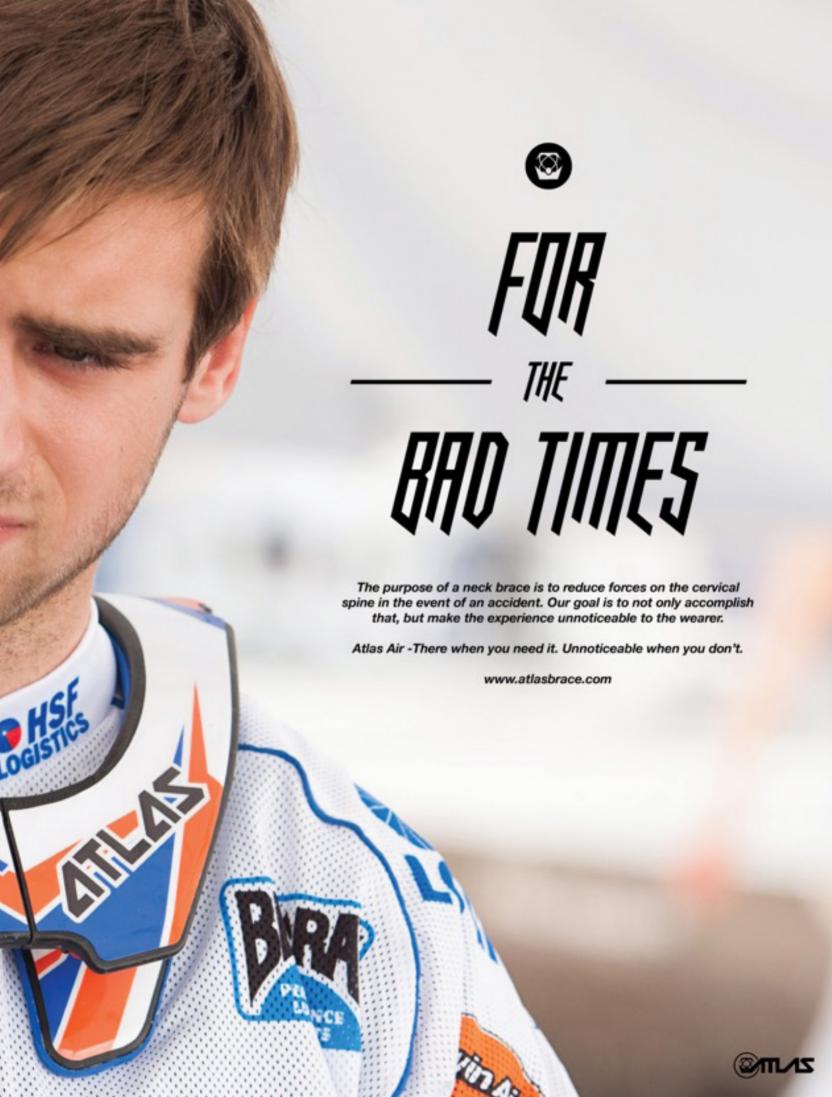
relation to his lap-time. In MXGP it is more about how an athlete is handling the track in its current guise with aspects like pre-race prep, the climate, watering, the amount of classes at any given grand prix, the proficiency of the circuit staff on their reparation work and then the appropriateness of their own set-up for the surface.

The same diversity of opinion about a track in MXGP - some like rough and slippery conditions, for example, while others hate them and sand is a whole other ball game - can also be found in MotoGP concerning the tyres and the different behavioural aspects of each particular motorcycle. All-in-all I'd much rather hear the human aspect of a MotoGP rider's plight to set a faster time than discuss his tyre allocation and fears but to ignore this is essentially a failure to tap into the reasons for his or her confidence or worry. By the same token I've heard enough complaints about motocross tracks to last several lifetimes - even if athletes still insist on attaching the strange and utterly inaccurate "it's the same for everyone" (it clearly isn't) qualifier on their comments.

So many things can affect mood and mindset. At Qatar last Friday Eugene Laverty had endured a hard FP3 session full of glitches and the articulate Irishman looked positively downtrodden. In MXGP the stern exterior of Gautier Paulin over the better part of twelve months has shown an exceptional athlete unable to glue the pieces of his puzzle together (and now the Frenchman is on the sidelines, unable to contest the next Grand Prix, possibly to miss the next three and his future at HRC looks questionable). Tony Cairoli wasn't smiling too much in 2015 with his bike swap dilemma and injury trouble whereas Romain Febvre's blossoming esteem manifested itself in his riding with the Frenchman more attacking and unforgiving as the season progressed. There is much more behind success and failure than simply tyres and set-up and track conditions; but it is rare that a rider will break it down for you particularly behind a microphone or MP3 recorder.







AMA-SX

DETROITFORD FIELD · MARCH 18th · Rnd 11 of 17

450SX winner: Jason Anderson, Husqvarna 250SX East winner: Malcolm Stewart



AFTER ELEVEN SUCCESSIVE WEEKENDS OF SUPERCROSS THE MONSTER ENERGY SERIES FINALLY GETS A BREATHER OVER EASTER AND SOME TIME FOR THE LIKES OF KEN ROCZEN, ELI TOMAC AND NOW MARVIN MUSQUIN TO GAIN SOME STOCK ON HOW TO POSSIBLY MAKE LIFE DIFFICULT FOR RYAN DUNGEY. STEVE MATTHES CHECKS WITH A VIEW ON DETROIT LAST SATURDAY

By Steve Matthes, Photos by Simon Cudby

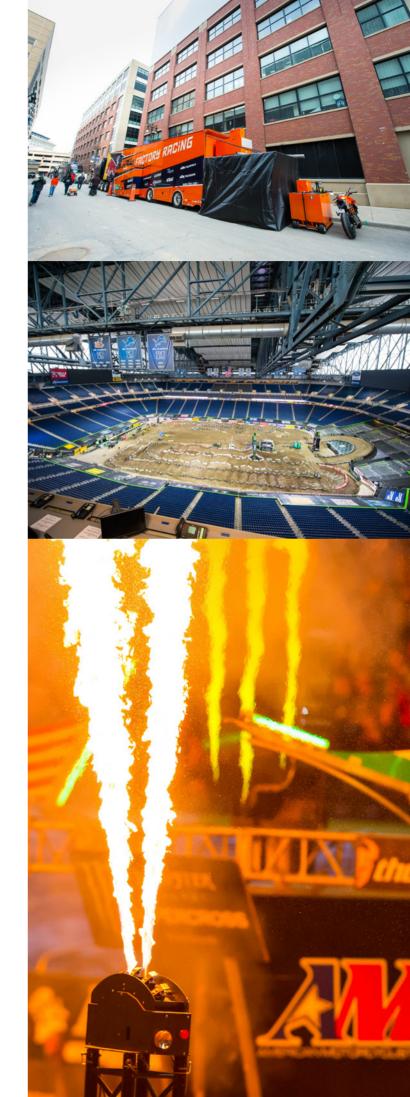


The eleventh round of the Monster Energy Supercross series had some unique things about it. At this point it's a forgone conclusion that Red Bull KTM's Ryan Dungey is going to snag another 450SX crown so we're definitely into the dog days of the series right now. The questions about Eli Tomac seem to be going unanswered, Ken Roczen has been too inconsistent for his liking, Jason Anderson's time is coming but not here yet and Trey Canard, Chad Reed...things just aren't lining up for them on a week to week basis.

The 250SX Eastern Series has been anything but predictable through three rounds. Three different winners, a points leader who was unable to leave the United States for the Toronto round, crashes and charges makes for a wild contest. Rockstar Husqvarna's Martin Davalos was the man, then it was Yamalube/Star Yamaha's Jeremy Martin, then TLD KTM's Justin Hill and then this weekend, it was GEICO Honda's Malcolm Stewart with the win and now the points lead.

It was a masterful ride by Dungey to get by his teammate Marvin Musquin early in the race and ride away with his sixth win of the year and by a comfortable margin at that. On a track that deteriorated quickly and got slippery, Dungey made zero mistakes and was a happy camper after the race telling Racer X about how excited he was to have won and it's nice with the first (and only) weekend off.

But hold on. Soon after the race the FIM/AMA. urged on by Yamaha by some reports, took a look at Dungey's jumping onto a tabletop when a red cross flag was thrown for a crash by RCH Suzuki's Jake Weimer and decided after the race to dock him two spots. It's the first time in AMA Supercross history that a win was taken away (Yamaha's Chad Reed was docked 25 points for illegal fuel after winning the 2004 Dallas SX but the win was allowed to stand) after the race. And so a late race pass by Rockstar Husgyarna's Jason Anderson on a fallen Musquin moved him up for his second career win and second of the season. By all accounts Dungey did indeed jump onto the tabletop with the flag waving which is a no-no (the rule book says you have to "roll" the track when that flag is out which is also a bit grey right?)





but in his defense there really wasn't any danger in what he did, he had a firm hold on the race and other riders did the exact same move and it went un-penalized. The TV broadcast also showed Yamaha's Chad Reed braking heavily to avoid doing what Dungey did so there's that.

Dungey's team manager Roger DeCoster told Vital MX after the race his side of the story: "Somebody brought up (after the race) that Ryan jumped when the red cross flag was up and it was out but the guy was standing on the very inside of the turn and Ryan was on the far outside with his view looking outside," DeCoster said "And the flag was waist high but no way for him (Ryan) to see him. He did see something out of the corner of his eye and he looked back. But by then the guy had moved in from where he was when he gave Ryan the flag."

"The next riders could see the flag more easily and were taking a completely different line so they could see the flag more than Ryan could. They all still jumped but not as far as Ryan. There was no rider or bike on the track that was down when that flag came out. The rider had moved in-between the lanes at that point."

"The AMA is under pressure and they did penalize Jason Anderson in San Diego and they are under pressure to treat everyone the same. In San Diego there was a gain by Jason but here there really was no gain. I think the flaggers need to do a better job."

I wrote more about this in my OTOR blog but suffice to say this move is a dangerous precedent in that it didn't affect the race result one bit, Dungey and KTM's contention that the official didn't make himself that clear is a solid case and it happens almost every weekend without penalty. I would bet heavily on the officials now being VERY busy reviewing jumping on a red cross flag videos from many teams in the pits from here on out.

So Anderson wins and it's nice to see for his team and him as round one was a long time ago. Anderson's probably been week-in and week-out the second fastest rider in the series but bad starts and some moves that he probably regrets has held him back. Consistency is something that has bitten everyone in the 450SX class outside of the champ and Jason is just another one that's got to figure out how to limit the damage in the bad races. When he's 'on', he's very fast but when he's off, he's prone to self-inflicted damage.

Speaking of round one, Musquin was coming off an injury and basically rode around in 14th place. He didn't have an ideal off-season entering his first 450SX year and not that much was expected of him. Even when he scored a podium in Oakland it was more of him getting a great start and breaking free of everyone else early in the race. At least that's what we thought.

Well what do we know? The two-time World Champion scored his fourth straight podium (don't forget he was two turns from winning Atlanta a couple of weeks ago) and this after a hard crash in his heat that forced him to go to the semi to make the main. Musquin appears to have a ton of confidence right now and is perhaps the surprise of the series.

"To get 3rd here in Detroit and coming in here I knew it was going to be a tough one because last year was a little bit of a struggle on the 250 just to find traction, but obviously I did better on the 450," Marvin told Racer X after the race and before he was moved to second after the Dungey penalty "We worked hard on the team. To be 3rd right now, should have been a 2nd obviously without the crash but that's racing and things happen like that. But four weekends in a row on the podium - that's awesome."

In the 250SX class it was last week's winner TLD KTM's Justin Hill knocking himself silly in practice and unable to line up for the night show. This threw the entire series up for grabs like when round one winner Davalos was unable to show up for round two. Big whoops at Detroit equals big fun for Mookie Stewart and he rode to a pretty easy win, his second career one and first of the year. He also rode himself



right into the red plate with points leader Jeremy Martin's crash-filled main event. Stewart's dead, dead last to sixth ride last week in Toronto just might have saved this series for him and he showed us all that this week at least, he's the man.

Stay tuned though because if 250SX had proven anything, it's that you can't predict a thing!

"It was one of those ones that you feel good and just hope for the best. It was a clean sweep" Stewart told Racer X about winning the heat and the main event. "I can't thank GEICO Honda enough for that. It was one of those things where it's all about having fun and I'm glad that I got it over with. It sucked for [Jeremy] Martin to go down like that, as well as for Hill. I hope he comes back. You never want to see those guys out or anything like that. And definitely it's good to see Martin [Davalos] come back as well. It's one of those things. We're going to take a couple of weeks off and then get back at it. We've got five more races to go, so it's definitely going to come down all the way to Vegas for sure."

Star Yamaha's Aaron Plessinger took second place and TLD KTM sort of saved the night for the team when Shane McElrath scored a third place. Davalos was way back after a crash and could only manage a fifth and Martin, well a lowly thirteenth was the best he could do. So with a two week break in the series, Stewart leads Martin by seven and Plessinger by thirteen. The series other two winners, Hill and Davalos are fourth and fifth after four races.

-Monster Pro Circuit Kawasaki's season to forget on the east continued when Tyler Bowers (who won another heat race) missed the podium with a fourth. He did ride well to come from pretty far back but standing off the podium is not what he's supposed to do. But hey, it was better than the teams other rider Arnaud Tonus who led early but then crashed his way out yet again. The Swiss rider is indeed struggling to find his way indoors and we could be adding him to the list of fast GP riders that were unable to figure out the supercross game.







Back to business for Chad Reed after two dismal rounds. The Australian found a start and some form for fourth position. Jeremy Martin (right) still has the SX jury swaying over his title credentials while Tyler Bowers (below) rode superbly to fourth but needs to deliver a victory for the thirsty Pro Circuit squad. The first non-Japanese brand podium of the season was also a clean sweep for Aldon Baker's class of '16











AMA-SX CLASSIFICATION & CHAMPIONSHIP

AMA 450SX RESULT Riders 1 Jason Anderson, USA Husqvarna 2 Marvin Musquin, FRA KTM 3 Ryan Dungey, USA KTM 4 Chad Reed, AUS Yamaha

Kawasaki

5 Eli Tomac, USA

AMA 2505X WEST RESULT					
Riders					
1	Malcolm Stewart, USA	Honda			
2	Aaron Plessinger, USA	Yamaha			
3	Shane McElrath, USA	KTM			
4	Tyler Bowers, USA	Kawasaki			
5	Martin Davalos, USA	Husqvarna			

((AFTER 11 OF 17 ROUNDS)				
Riders		ders	Points		
-	1	Ryan Dungey	253		
- 2	2	Ken Roczen	214		
	3	James Anderson	200		
4	4	Eli Tomac	186		
_	5	Marvin Musquin	178		

AMA 450SX STANDINGS

AMA 250SX EAST STANDINGS (AFTER 3 OF 8 ROUNDS)			
Ri	iders	Points	
1	Malcolm Stewart	80	
2	Jeremy Martin	73	
3	Aaron Plessinger	67	
4	Justin Hill	63	
5	Martin Davalos	61	



ADVANTAGE AUSTRIA...

By Steve Matthes

A couple things came to mind watching Detroit Supercross which was round eleven out of seventeen of the Monster Energy Supercross Series and saw a different winner from the rider that took the checkers for what we believe is the first time in supercross history.

As we all know Red Bull KTM's Ryan Dungey lost when it was determined that he jumped a double with the red cross flags shown indicating a downed rider. Ryan was docked two positions and the win was given to Rockstar Husqvarna's Jason Anderson who took the checkers in second. The penalty being enforced isn't anything new, we've seen it done before and Anderson himself lost a podium at San Diego when he was moved from third to fifth for doing the same thing as Dungey.

Dungey and his team allegedly weren't happy with the official's position on the jump coming right out of a turn and felt it was unfair. Yamaha's Chad Reed saw the flag and immediately hit his brakes but there were other witnesses that said many other riders did the same thing as Dungey and were not penalized.

The rule itself is fine, safety can't be messed with but it's long overdue in this reporter's opinion for a travelling flag safety team. Whether it's supercross or the Lucas Oil Pro Motocross Championships, there are examples every week of flagging gone wrong. The flagging crew consists of AMA officials who are in charge of when the red-cross flag goes out or local volunteers who man the yellow flags and in both cases I've seen so many flaws. Whether it's the volunteers directing riders towards the downed rider, the red cross coming out needlessly or way before

it needs to or whatever else, there's never much talk about trying to fix what's become a major problem. Never mind the application of the blue flags for riders being lapped and what a mess that is as well.

There's enough money and plenty at stake in both series to dedicate a group of people who know what to do in any situation. Where to stand, when to wave flags and what flag is needed are all things that I see need improvement almost every weekend. Whether Dungey was in the right or not, it's time to step up the quality of the flagging.

-Whether Dungey was docked or not, the fact remains that there was a 450SX podium without a Japanese bike on it for the first time this season and maybe ever. Jason Anderson on the 'orange' Husqvarna and Dungey's teammate Marvin Musquin joined him up there to make an all-Austrian machine top three. As someone that was on the first ever KTM factory team here in America in 2001 and 2001, the orange machines have come a long way. Shutting that effort down after six years, KTM joined forces with a couple of private teams before re-launching with the hire of Roger De Coster. A couple of years ago KTM's primary shareholder acquired Husqvarna and we now have another brand in the sport that is 95% reliant on KTM technology.

We're at the point now in professional racing where KTM is very dominant and its bikes are great. Whether it's SX, MX, the GP's or off-road, it seems that podiums everywhere are splashed with orange or in the case of this week, covered in it (with some white overcoat).



And don't think the Japanese haven't noticed this. I was talking with a VIP on the racing side of an OEM about a month ago and he remarked that they've had the "shit kicked out of them" by KTM and this has been a complete surprise. This person mentioned that it was a good thing that KTM's come in and done what they have because maybe it woke the Japanese up a bit. They're very competitive companies and this can't be sitting well with them. This VIP predicted that his own OEM was gearing up to spend some money and make improvements to their bike and perhaps this orange runaway train prompted Yamaha to come back in after being away for six years.

Honda's been toying with a hydraulic clutch and electric start on their race machines; all things that have been standard on a KTM for years. They've got an all-new machine coming out next year. Kawasaki launched a pretty different 2016 machine this year that they're still working out the bugs. Yamaha's gone a totally different direction with their bike and as mentioned, are back racing with direct factory involvement. Only Suzuki seems to be spinning its wheels a bit but in 2018 they'll release a new machine as well.

If this person at the OEM was to be believed KTM has awoken some sleeping giants and they're not happy with what's been going on. That's good to hear because competition makes everyone better but it also makes me wonder when I see the present and the future of KTM/ Husky that maybe I should've chimed it and asked if it might be too late?







ALPINESTARS

An attractive riding garment for ladies is provided by the Stella Amok Air Drystar Jacket, one of the leading items from Alpinestars' Stella Spring collection. Available at the RRP of 300 euros or 270 pounds the company like to throw a range of technical features through their promotion material but the truth is that the poly-fabric shell construction means a comprehensive mix of mesh panels, protection (bio-air CE padding and protectors) and weather proofing. The jacket can be customised and adjusted for the ideal fit and comes in black/grey and white/grey. Alpinestars also claim the Stella Amok has: 'an interchangeable DRYSTAR® waterproof liner and can be worn in a variety of weather climates.'

For the feet then the Faster-2 Shoe is a lightweight and eye-catching option for riding. Alpinestars say the '2' has undergone development and boasts and new heel construction and speedy lacing system adapted from the firm's work in F1. This shoe/boot has a 'multicompound construction ergonomic'. There are lateral ankle inserts protection, a new rubber compound sole, performance padding on the tongue and collar for comfort and a flex insert on the heel. The Faster-2 has a distinct look that might not be to everyone's taste (there are four different designs) but it is a decent compromise on the bike where a degree of resistance is needed to offset the comfort of a trainer. Prices start at 130 euros or 115 pounds.



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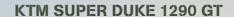
MUSEU MOTO BARCELONA

In the depths of Barcelona's 'old town' lies the Museu Moto. The existence of the museum is hardly a surprise considering the sheer amount of bikes on the streets and the passion for motorcycling shown by the city and spread throughout the rest of Catalunya and Spain. We've visited before and found a small but well-curated, researched and presented line-up of bikes and a fine display of the boom of historic manufacturers - Bultaco. Montesa, Ossa, Derbi and more - that once fed out of Catalunya and helped advanced the technical march of motorcycling in Europe. The 'museo' recently launched their '100 years of the Scooter: 1916-2016' temporary exhibit featuring more than thirty examples spanning the history of this type of bike donated by the likes of private collectors and including rare models like the 1920 ABC Skotamota or the 1944 Brockhouse Corgi. At the heart of the exposition is the best-selling motorcycle in history the Honda Super Cub with allegedly 90 million units shifted. The 1957 KTM Mirabell has been loaned by Austria and the likes of a fully 'modded' Lambretta and the 1953 Vespa bought by Salvador Dali are also on show.

The exhibition runs for a year but the museum and accompanying gift shop are open for all visitors. To learn more, find the location and check times then look here: www.museumoto.com

Photos by Museu Moto





IS THE SPORTS-TOURER MAKING A COMEBACK?
WHAT KIND OF ANIMAL (WITH 1290 SUPER DUKE
BEAST DNA) IS THE GT ANYWAY? ROLAND HEADS TO
THE ROADS AND CURVES OF MAJORCA TO SEE WHAT
THE AUSTRIANS HAVE SERVED UP...

PIGEONHOLE

By Roland Brown, Photos by Marco Campelli & Sebas Romero



TEST

The traditional sports-tourer has almost disappeared off the radar over the last decade or so, as its job description – powerful, sporty machine with wind protection, comfort and luggage-carrying ability – has increasingly been filled by adventure bikes. But the arrival of KTM's 1290 Super Duke GT suggests the sports-tourer might just be making a comeback, in subtly updated form: as a more versatile, kitted-out version of a super-naked.

Those GT initials stand for Grand Tourer (or Gran Turismo, if you prefer), which brings to mind a slightly posher sports-tourer. Which makes it slightly ironic that motorcycling's latest GT is based on KTM's Super Duke, which when originally launched in 2005 was the ultimate two-wheeled bad boy – a raw, powerful V-twin with a twitchy throttle response, zero practicality and a liking for wheelies and skids.

Perhaps it's unfair to link the GT to that early ancestor, because the Super Duke has grown up since those days, most notably with the current 1290 Super Duke R. That 180bhp naked V-twin rocket was by far the most powerful and fastest of the family on its launch two years ago, but it also brought a new-found conservatism with its refined throttle response and cutting-edge electronics. And following its release, its development team realised they could take things further with a more versatile derivative.

The 1290 Super Duke GT does just that. Although the GT has a much less aggressive image than the R, the two models share plenty of components including virtually all the 1301cc, eight-valve V-twin powerplant. Peak output is slightly down but with a claimed 173bhp the GT is still stunningly powerful, and has the midrange output to match.



Features including Brembo Monobloc front brake calipers and a gearbox quick-shifter add to the impression of a speed-hungry sportster in Super Duke tradition. But the GT's spec also includes comfort-focused components including an adjustable screen, generous 23-litre fuel tank, broad dual-seat, cornering headlights, heated handlebar grips and cruise control.

KTM's engineers didn't need to do much to the 75-degree V-twin engine. They reshaped the combustion chambers, tweaked the injection mapping and added a new exhaust, partly to get the bike through Euro 4 emissions tests. The GT keeps the R-bike's three engine modes, and benefits from a state-of-the-art electronics package controlled by Bosch's tiny but ultrapowerful six-axis inertial measurement unit.





KTM SUPER DUKE 1290 GT







It's a gloriously strong engine, its sweet throttle response and broad spread of power combining to make the GT as effortlessly controllable as it is rapid. Cracking open the throttle even from below 5000rpm generates an instant, effortless surge of acceleration. And the bike loves to rev, stampeding towards a top speed of around 160mph with assistance from KTM's first quick-shifter, which works only on up-changes.

High-speed cruising is respectably comfortable, thanks to the GT's screen and the width of its gas tank, which shields legs from the wind. But the screen doesn't do much to keep hands out of the cold air. And although it can be adjusted for height while the bike's moving, there's only about 50mm to play with and I couldn't find a position that eliminated turbulence.

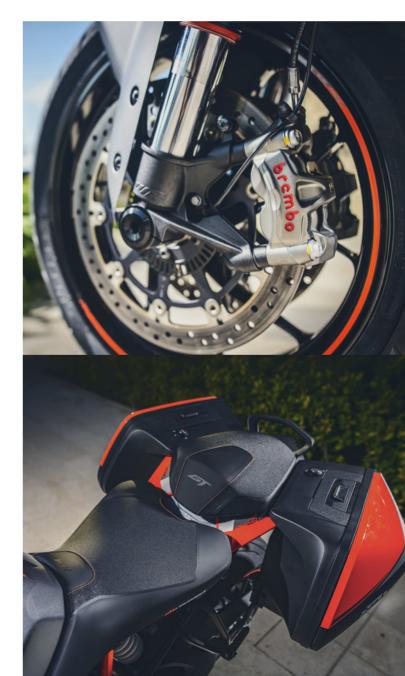
Handling is excellent, thanks to a chassis that merges the Super Duke R's tubular steel main frame and basic geometry with WP semi-active suspension based on that of the 1290 Super Adventure. There's an unchanged menu of three settings: Sport, Street and Comfort. Even the firmest Sport is reasonably compliant, due partly to the GT's generous 125mm of front and 156mm of rear travel.

The KTM is pretty light, at 205kg dry, and corners accurately while staying very controlled, and benefitting from the sophisticated traction control system. The electronic system also allows cornering ABS to supplement the powerful brake system, which features Brembo's Monobloc front calipers.

So you can ride fast, stop hard and have a lot of fun on the GT, and you can also cover serious distance in comfort. The 23-litre tank allows a realistic range of over 150 miles. Convenience or safety features include daytime running lights, self-cancelling indicators and the easily used cruise control. Purpose-built accessory panniers each hold a full-face helmet. Other accessories include a heated seat to back-up the hot grips that are provided as standard.

Inevitably the GT's high specification and long features list mean that it's expensive, costing roughly ten per cent more than the naked 1290 Super Duke R in most markets (£15,999 compared to £14,149 in the UK). In most respects it's well worth the premium, because it offers the super-naked model's attributes, except perhaps raw image, in a more rounded and useable package.

The GT arguably lacks the weather protection required to be a true Grand Tourer but it's as civilised and well-equipped as it's fast. And KTM's most sensible Super Duke proves that however a sports-tourer's essential blend of speed, comfort and practicality is achieved, the concept remains just as relevant now as it has ever been.

















'On-track Off-road' is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focussed on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP. 'On-track Off-road' will be published online at www.ontrackoffroad.com every other Tuesday. To receive an email notification that a new issue available with a brief description of each edition's contents simply enter an address in the box provided on the homepage. All email addresses will be kept strictly confidential and only used for purposes connected with OTOR.

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